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FOR NEA/ELA

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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN REACTION TO BIN LADIN STATEMENT LIMITED

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Reaction in Jordan to Usama bin Ladin's most recent statement, broadcast March 14 on Al-Jazeera, has been muted, despite bin Ladin's call to use Jordan as a front from which to "liberate Palestine." In the days immediately following the tape's broadcast, Jordan's media outlets--including electronic websites and newspapers--carried factual accounts of the statement but did not react to or comment on his references to Jordan.

¶2. (U) A columnist for the Jordanian daily Al-Dustur, interviewed on Al-Jazeera, commented that had bin Ladin succeeded in Iraq it would make more sense to talk about a second stage--liberating Palestine through Jordan; however, given present realities, bin Ladin seemed to be "putting the cart before the horse." Muhammad Abu Rumman, a former member of Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood and now columnist for Al-Ghad, concurred by noting that after the significant erosion of Al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI), bin Laden's talk seemed unrealistic and fanciful.

¶3. (C) Abu Rumman expanded on the points in the Al-Jazeera interview in a March 22 meeting with PolChief. Bin Ladin's statement ignored not only the weakness of AQI, but also Al-Qa'ida's lack of a foothold in Jordan and the improved performance of regional security forces in combating the organization. Abu Rumman assessed that the fanciful nature of bin Ladin's comments accounted for the lack of significant Jordanian reaction. Another Al-Ghad columnist, Muhammad al-Momani, provided PolChief with a slightly different take. Momani said that while this may be the first time bin Ladin has mentioned Jordan in this context, informed observers have known for some time that Jordan is in Al-Qa'ida's crosshairs for its moderate policies and relationship with the West.

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